

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1949

Volume X, Number 19

Rachel W. Coffin, Editor

Week of July 18, 1949

1949 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared
In These Volumes

Stage Play

1948 Vol.

Anne of the Thousand Days.....	128
As the Girls Go.....	139
Don't Listen, Ladies.....	100
Edward, My Son.....	214
*Goodbye, My Fancy.....	152
Inside U.S.A.....	279
Jenny Kissed Me.....	112
*Kiss Me, Kate.....	91
*Lend an Ear.....	122
Life With Mother.....	182
Light Up the Sky.....	148
Love Life.....	201
Madwoman of Chaillot (The).....	104
Make Mine Manhattan.....	382
Make Way for Lucia.....	115
*Mister Roberts.....	338
My Romance.....	186
Oh, Mr. Meadowbrook!.....	108
Private Lives.....	209
Rape of Lucretia (The).....	95
Red Gloves.....	132
Silver Whistle (The).....	139
Small Wonder.....	244
Summer and Smoke.....	205
*Where's Charley?.....	197
Young and Fair (The).....	143

1947 Vol.

High Button Shoes.....	304
*Streetcar Named Desire (A).....	249

1946 Vol.

Annie Get Your Gun.....	382
*Born Yesterday.....	466

1944 Vol.

Harvey.....	95
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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play
week of July 18, 1949

1949 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1949

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	Page
All for Love.....	377
Along Fifth Avenue.....	392
Anybody Home.....	346
At War With the Army.....	336
Big Knife (The).....	325
Biggest Thief in Town (The).....	325
*Cabalgata.....	284
*Death of a Salesman.....	358
*Detective Story.....	330
Diamond Lil.....	369
Forward the Heart.....	374
*Funzapoppin.....	288
Gayden.....	296
Happiest Years (The).....	303
Ivy Green (The).....	316
Leaf and Bough.....	381
Magnolia Alley.....	308
*Miss Liberty.....	279
Mr. Adam.....	292
Mrs. Gibbons' Boys.....	300
My Name Is Aquilon.....	362
Richard III.....	365
Shop at Sly Corner (The).....	386
Smile of the World (The).....	396
*South Pacific.....	312
They Knew What They Wanted.....	354
Traitor (The).....	322
Two Blind Mice.....	342

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD

302

Next Issue Due in September

There are no new theatre openings scheduled in New York
during the remainder of the summer. Most scheduled
theatre openings in mid-September; those containing reviews
will be mailed as usual the following week.

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of July 18, 1949

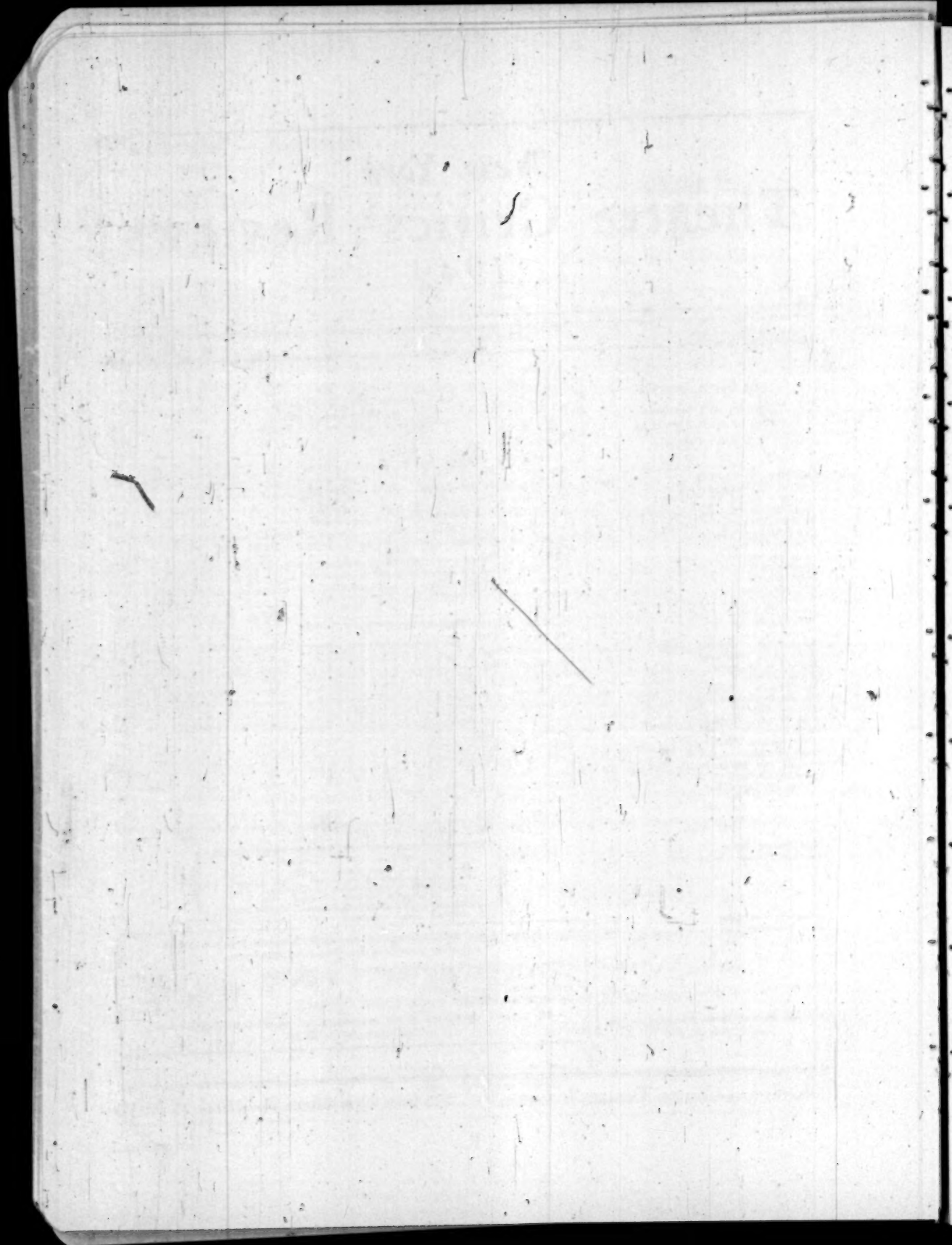
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originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK POST HOME NEWS
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK MIRRO

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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK SUN

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"Miss Liberty"

The New York Times

JULY 16, 1949

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

To come right out and say so in public, "Miss Liberty" is a disappointing musical comedy. It is built on an old-fashioned model and it is put together without sparkle or originality. This is the Statue of Liberty antic with songs and lyrics by Irving Berlin, the best-loved song-writer in America, and a book by Robert E. Sherwood, the loftiest playwright in the country, who has won the Pulitzer Prize so many times that now he can keep it. After playing to Broadway audiences for a month in Philadelphia, "Miss Liberty" turned up at the Imperial last evening, where it is more accessible to our local burghers.

Mr. Sherwood is said to have thought of writing a musical play about the Statue of Liberty when he saw how it affected American GI's bound for Europe during the war. At the close of the play, Mr. Berlin has set Emma Lazarus' eminent verses to a solemn hymn for a reverent finale. But most of "Miss Liberty" is devoted to a pedestrian tale of a circulation war between The New York World and The New York Herald, centering around the Statue of Liberty and exploiting a French girl who is fraudulently presented as Bartholdi's model for the sculpture. On the whole, Mr. Sherwood is not much more inspired than

the authors of "Up In Central Park."

No doubt everyone in America will be familiar sooner or later with Mr. Berlin's romantic melody, "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk." Simple and sweet in tune and pleasant in its literary style, it is typical of Mr. Berlin's best work. To at least one theatergoer this is the best song in his current music box. The rest are competent and professional—especially the jovial "Homework," which Mary McCarty sings heartily, and the caustic "Only for Americans," which Ethel Griffies, as the madwoman of a Paris bridge, packs full of malice. Mr. Berlin also has written some good numbers for dancing. But still the impression persists that this is not one of Mr. Berlin's most memorable scores and that he has written other songs in the past in very similar idioms.

Probably the authors of "Miss Liberty," and Moss Hart, its director, never intended Miss Griffies to be the star of their show. But that is how it has worked out. For she has the only forceful and straightforward part in the book and she is an old hand at making something tart and definite out of any material. Allyn McLerie, as the French impostor, is a winning dancer and an attractive person, but the part Mr. Sherwood has given her is a pallid one. As a nitwit photographer, Eddie Albert is humorously gauche and gives an excellent performance. Miss McCarty tosses herself exuberantly into a tom-boy role.

The cast also includes Philip Bourneuf as Pulitzer of The World,

Musical comedy with music and lyrics by Irving Berlin; book by Robert E. Sherwood; directed by Moss Hart; choreography by Jerome Robbins; settings by Oliver Smith; costumes by Motley; presented by Mr. Berlin, Mr. Sherwood and Mr. Hart at the Imperial Theatre, July 15, 1949. The cast:

Maisie Dell	Mary McCarty
The Herald Reader	John Thompson
James Gordon Bennett	Charles Dingle
Horace Miller	Eddie Albert
Police Captain	Evans Thornton
The Mayor	Donald McClelland
French Ambassador	Emile Renan
Carthwright	Sid Lawson
Joseph Pulitzer	Philip Bourneuf
The Sharks	Bill Bradley, Allen Knowles
	Kazimir Kolic, Robert Pagant
Bartholdi	Herbert Berghof
The Models	Stephanie Augustine
	Trudy Delux, Marilyn Frchette
Monique DuPont	Allyn McLerie
The Boy	Tommy Rall
The Girl	Maria Karnilova
The Acrobats	Virginia Connell
	Joe Millan, Eddie Phillips
Strong Man	Kazimir Kolic
The Countess	Ethel Griffies

Charles Dingle as Bennett of The Herald and Herbert Berghof as the sculptor Bartholdi. None of them has anything of much significance to do.

But there are three other functionaries of "Miss Liberty" who have found something fresh to contribute to an old show formula—Jerome Robbins, master of the ballet, the Motleys, costume designers, and Oliver Smith, scene designer. Mr. Robbins has provided a tumultuous Paris masquerade for the first act, and a riotous policemen's ball for the second, with some superb dancing by

'MISS LIBERTY'

A Lover	Ed Chappel
His Girl	Helene Whitney
A Gendarme	Robert Penn
A Lamplighter	John Thompson
Another Lamplighter	Tommy Rall
A Socialite	Marilyn Frchette
An Actress	Helene Whitney
A Minister	Ed Chappel
An Admiral	Robert Patterson
The Boys	Bob Kryn, Ernest Laird
The Mother	Elizabeth Watts
The Policeman	Evans Thornton
The Brothers	Lewis Bolyard
	David Golyer
The Train	Eddie Phillips, Erik Kristen
	Joseph Milan
Reception Delegation	Dolores Goodman, Virginia Connell, Fred Hearn
	Bob Tucker, Allen Knowles
A Maid	Gloria Patrice
The Dandy	Tommy Rall
Ruby	Maria Karnilova
A Sailor	Eddie Phillips
His Girl	Dolores Goodman
Richard K. Fox	Donald McClelland
The Judge	Erik Kristen
A Policeman	Robert Patterson
Immigration Officer	Evans Thornton
A Boy	William Calhoun

Tommy Rall.

The Motleys have dressed the show beautifully and Mr. Smith has enclosed it in enchanting scenes of New York and Paris. The noble old lady of Bedloe's Island looks fine and has inspired some gay dancing. But neither Mr. Sherwood nor Mr. Berlin has much to contribute to the saga of "Liberty Enlightening the World," as the Bartholdi statue was first designated. Returning the musical stage to the North Atlantic, they have turned out a routine show.

New York Post HOME NEWS

JULY 17, 1949

Sherwood-Berlin 'Miss Liberty' Just Another Musical Show

By Richard Watts Jr.

There is, as Irving Berlin once noted classically, no business like show business. Certainly there is no business, or anything else, quite like it for bewildering and heart-breaking uncertainty. Think of a period musical play, set in Manhattan in the days when the Statue of Liberty was new, with the book by Robert E. Sherwood, the score by Irving Berlin, the direction by Moss Hart, and the choreography by Jerome Robbins, and you look forward to an evening of theatrical bliss. It may be a little unfair to such justifiably eminent gentlemen, but that is what one inescapably expects. Yet "Miss Liberty," which opened at the Imperial Friday night, is the work

of all these illustrious talents, and it is only pretty fair.

Unquestionably, it has its points. Thanks to the settings by Oliver Smith and the costumes by Motley, it has color and beauty. Mr. Robbins has created some gay, lively and amusing dances. Mr. Berlin, the best-beloved of American song writers, has composed for it at least two numbers, "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk" and "Homework," which are in

his most cherished vein. Mr. Sherwood's book is, for the most part, pleasantly modest and unpretentious. Several agreeable performers give the proceedings brightness and vivacity. Whatever must be said against it, "Miss Liberty" is neither a botch nor a bore. It is pleasant, good-looking, tuneful and surprisingly commonplace.

Having given its creators credit for their various achievements, it is now my sullen duty to point out what seem to me their demerits. There is nothing to take back about the sets by Mr. Smith, the costumes by Motley, the choreography of Mr. Robbins, or, for that matter, the staging by Mr. Hart. But Mr. Berlin's score, despite its two numbers already mentioned, a good comic song for that sprightly and delightful veteran, Ethel Griffies, and a general air of tunelessness, is by no means one of his major jobs. There is, in the main, an atmosphere of reminiscence familiarity which keeps it from being the triumph of popular music-writing we have come to expect from him.

The Book

Then there is the book-trouble

that Mr. Sherwood has unfortunately got himself into. I think that in great part the difficulty arises from an attempt to do two differing things at the same time. Basically he has written a farcical narrative about a hoax played on that titan of the press, James Gordon Bennett, in the course of his circulation war with his rival titan, Joseph Pulitzer. The hoax consists of the efforts of a young news photographer to foist upon the publisher a pretty French girl as the model for the Statue of Liberty. The attempts of the photographer, the young woman, and her proudly disreputable grandmother to keep their trick a secret and the final exposure of their amiable masquerade make for a tenuous but passable framework for the music and dancing.

In the final episodes, however, an attempt has been made to give the comedy narrative a serious and patriotic viewpoint about the American spirit of freedom and opportunity for the oppressed of the world. It is certainly a valuable and worthy message for today, and those lines from the poem by Emma Lazarus inscribed upon the Statue of Liberty, about the masses yearn-

"Miss Liberty"—continued

ing to breathe free, are eloquent and beautiful enough to be remembered and celebrated in song and story as Mr. Berlin and Mr. Sherwood sincerely strive to do. The unfortunate thing is that they do not fit in with the rest of the show.

Hoax and Message

Both hoax and message are satisfactory enough singly, but the connection between them is hardly visible to the eye of an

audience. Instead of supporting each other, they turn out to be mutually disruptive, and they end only on a note of mild confusion. As I have said, "Miss Liberty" is by no means a bore. It is, indeed, an almost consistently agreeable, if hardly exciting, musical show. And it is, no doubt unfair to expect more from its authors than from the average writers of girl-and-music entertainment, merely because their reputations are so great. There is no escaping the

fact, though, that more is expected.

The performers can best be described as pleasant. The chief show-stopping is accomplished by the aforementioned Miss Griffies, as the disreputable grandmother, in her song called "Only For Americans." Allyn McLerie is quietly attractive as the girl who is supposed to have posed for the statue. Mary McCarty is engaging and vital as a

lovelorn girl reporter. Eddie Albert is likeable as the young man in the hoax. Charles Dingle and Philip Bourneuf are, respectively, the Messrs. Bennett and Pulitzer. And young Gloria Patrice, prettiest of the current chorus girls, brightens things up immeasurably. But I am afraid "Miss Liberty" is only so-so.

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
JULY 16, 1949

— By HOWARD BARNES —

The Big Three Miss

AN OPULENT and ponderous musical comedy has interrupted Broadway's summer siesta at the Imperial. "Miss Liberty" has trappings galore and some captivating dance routines devised by Jerome Robbins. The big three of the extravaganzas, Irving Berlin, Robert E. Sherwood and Moss Hart, have scarcely been inspired. The composer-lyricist has written reminiscent songs which tax the best efforts of the principals and chorus. Sherwood's libretto about

an 1885 newspaper hoax is both aimless and witless. And Hart's direction is far too studied for comfort. There are stretches of savor in "Miss Liberty," but there is none of the over-all bounce that makes for a distinguished musical.

Comedy is what is chiefly wanting in the production. The artful veteran, Ethel Griffies, succeeds in wringing laughter out of some of the stilted dialogue. The other players, including Allyn McLerie, Eddie Albert and Mary McCarty, are generally baffled by a plot which pits James Gordon Bennett against Joseph Pulitzer in a circulation war and has a French girl pretend to be the model for the Statue of Liberty. Berlin's "Homework" has amusing lyrics, but his tunes are given most of

their antic emphasis by the Robbins choreography. There is a wonderful brawl in "Follow the Leader Jig" and there is a nicely paced, rhythmical pattern to "Only For Americans."

It is easier to understand Sherwood's lapses in his first musical comedy book than those of his associates. Despite a major job of carpentering that is said to have been done on the show during an out-of-town try-out, it is random and tedious. The first act takes an interminable time establishing the central theme of the hoax. It is chiefly lightened by some scenes in Paris which are quite irrelevant to the plot. The second act gathers considerable momentum, but neither Berlin nor Hart have been successful in keeping the proceedings properly defined and engaging. Meanwhile the fetching set-

tings by Oliver Smith and the fancy Motley costumes merely make the undertaking pretentious.

Albert and Miss McLerie have the most awkward acting assignments as a dizzy photographer for Bennett and the French girl who acts as the impostor. They are at their best in the singing and dancing of such numbers as "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk" and "Me and My Bundle." Miss McCarty is exuberant and extremely attractive in "Homework." Miss Griffies shows them up every time she makes an appearance. Charles Dingle, Philip Bourneuf, Herbert Berghof and Tommy Hall are some of the other participants in "Miss Liberty." It is Robbins and his nimble dancers who contribute the chief sparkle to a sputtering show.

The Sun

JULY 16, 1949

By WARD MOREHOUSE.

"Miss Liberty" Not So Good.

To put it all in a quick decision, "Miss Liberty" is a sharp disappointment. Not the wonder work that you'd expect from such a high-powered combination as Berlin, Sher-

wood & Hart, but it has some exuberance and it moves along fairly well. The first performance was given last night at the Imperial, and it was received by one of the most glittery audiences that ever assembled in the Broadway area for a mid-summer premiere.

"Miss Liberty," gravely disappointing in that it is the contribution of a distinguished trio—Irving Berlin, Robert E. Sherwood and Moss Hart—is a musical production with some good songs, some genuinely exciting dance patterns, charming period settings by Oliver Smith and costumes by Motley, and with a book that is no more than passable.

Jerome Robbins, in working out lively and imaginative dance routines, has been somewhat more successful in his department than Berlin has been as a composer-lyricist, and he has far exceeded the achievements of Robert Sherwood as the librettist. The notion of circulation strife between those mighty jour-

telling, and it must have seemed so on paper, but it serves as a commonplace framework for a song and dance show. There is also the fact that Bennett and Pulitzer come through as dull characters and the revelation of the great hoax, which comes about in the second act, falls pretty flat.

But the weakness in the story structure of "Miss Liberty" didn't disturb the brilliant Robbins, nor did it particularly dismay Irving Berlin, who went heroically about the business of throwing out songs and putting in new ones during the frenzy of the try-out period. He has not written one of his best scores, but it is creditable. There are several good numbers, "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk," "Only for Americans" and "Homework" being three of them. Moss Hart has applied some directorial magic in pulling everything together, but notwithstanding his zeal and his showmanship and the written-to-order songs that Berlin has supplied—such as "Falling Out of Love Can Be Fun"—things run down rather steadily in the second act. "Miss Liberty" is always better when the ensemble is in action, or when Mary McCarty is taking over.

Miss McCarty, who came into attention in last season's "Small

Wonder," is a great asset. In the role of a reporter for the Police Gazette she has pungency and vitality. She sings a lot, and that's all to the good of the show. Allyn McLerie is delightful in her dancing and sings well enough. Eddie Albert, appearing as the American photographer who gets the French girl transported to our grateful shores, is impudent and ingratiating throughout.

There is scant comedy in "Miss Liberty," but Ethel Griffies, always a joy, achieves a few chuckles in her characterization of a raffish and outrageous old girl, a flower vender, who lives beneath the Parisian bridges and steals her flowers from the cemeteries. Charles Dingle and Philip Bourneuf, excellent actors, do not get much of an opportunity to characterize the roles of James Gordon Bennett and Joseph Pulitzer, respectively. There's a dainty sprite named Gloria Patrice who is quite the most seestful member of the big ensemble.

"Miss Liberty," less than you would expect from Berlin, Sherwood & Hart, is a big and colorful show. It won't bore you, but it will not exhilarate you particularly. No masterpiece, the Imperial's new production, an entertainment that gets a "No!" from this corner.

Daily Mirror

JULY 16, 1949

'Miss Liberty' Is Saluted As New B'way Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Miss Liberty," the new Irving Berlin-Robert E. Sherwood-Moss Hart musical, was saluted affectionately by an audience of smart first-nighters upon its arrival at the Imperial Theatre last evening. By curtain time, there was an advance sale of nearly half a million dollars for the new click.

Though the Berlin score is not his best, it boasts several numbers that will keep the populace humming in the shower of a morning. The one that's going to get the biggest workout, we predict, is "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk." "A Little Fish in a Big Pond," "Homework," "Only for Americans" and "Just One Way to Say I Love You" should consume a lot of radio

kilowatts and phonograph materials, too.

The Berlin score, believe us, is much more sprightly, tuneful and infectious on stage than it was via its initial radio airings. It's filled with catchy tunes and lyrics that grow on you with repetition.

The Sherwood book, which deals with a newspaper circulation war over the exploitation

of the Statue of Liberty, is serviceable. Upon it are draped the musical numbers, romance, considerable action and clever, swiftly-paced Jerome Robbins dances. The settings by Oliver Smith and the costumes by Motley are delights to the eye.

The Sherwood libretto is deeply in the debt of Ethel Griffies for its more amusing interludes. This wonderful trouper, who began her second career at a time when most of us would be seeking an easy—or even a wheel—chair, plays a high-spirited, raffish Parisian slicker with amazing vitality and effective mastery.

Mary McCarty, who won bravos in "Small Wonder," duplicates that feat this time out, as a brash reporter for the Police Gazette. Allyn McLerie, who drew bouquets opposite Ray Bolger in "Where's Charley?" is charming and versatile as a French girl who pretends to have posed for the Statue of Liberty. Eddie Albert is an ingratiating and bungling press photographer.

Citations also are due Charles Dingle, Philip Bourneuf, Herbert

Berghof, Tommy Rall and Maria Karnilova.

"Miss Liberty" is unique in that it was financed by composer Berlin, librettist Sherwood and director Hart. They are reported to have backed it to the tune of \$175,000. Judging by the enthusiastic applause of the lucky ticket-holders in the Imperial last night, they will make a handsome profit on their handiwork and investment.

Take our advice, and send along your check to the treasurer of the Imperial Theatre if you hope to see "Miss Liberty" this year. "Liberty" is going to prove as attractive in the theatre as in the minds of thinking men and women throughout the world.

The Police Department is to be complimented upon its handling of traffic in front of the Imperial. Incredible as it may seem, it really was possible last evening to get to your seat without losing a button or garnering a bruise.

Journal American

JULY 18, 1949

Fine Songs, A Good Book and A Top Cast

By ROBERT GARLAND

Nevertheless, since "Miss Liberty" came talking, dancing and singing into the Imperial over the past week-end, Summer Broadway has been a happier place in which to do your theatre-going. Believe me, this Irving Berlin-Robert E. Sherwood-Moss Hart musical comedy production is my kind of a talk-dance-and-song show. And if audience appreciation counts for anything, it is your kind of a talk-dance-and-song show as well.

With no off-island week-ending to attend to, I have seen quite a lot of "Miss Liberty" since it moved from Philadelphia onto Broadway. Under cover, I was among those present at the Thursday preview where previewers adored it. Friday, at the official opening, the huge plush audience remained on hand to cheer. And following the standing room only Saturday matinee, the congregation provided a genuine ovation.

Well, I, too, like "Miss Liberty" very much indeed. And it will come as no surprise if you, as a paying theatregoer, like it quite as much as I do. It has

a nostalgic but not too nostalgic story by Mr. Sherwood, familiar but not too familiar songs by Mr. Berlin and some of the most attaboyant dances Jerome Robbins has so far provided. These are not all.

To these, add pictorial settings in Oliver Smith's best manner, colorful costumes the Motleys have seldom equalled, lush orchestrations to Don Walker's credit, Jay Blackton doing his keen conductorial best with the Imperial's excellent orchestra and Ethel Griffies, Mary McCarty—

Maisie's a Daisy

Even if Robert E. Sherwood will not get one more Pulitzer prize for his "Miss Liberty" libretto, he has managed to devise a far better story than you would imagine from the papers. My only quarrel with Mr. Sherwood's narrative is that it fails to do right by its Maisie Dell. Maisie, let me tell you, is the best and brightest side of the piece's trans-Atlantic boy-meets-girl triangle,

Maisie, lady columnist of the Police Gazette, is the happily conceived hypotenuse of a threesome of which Horace Miller, photographer, and Monique Dupont, unemployed, are the others. While Horace is a hick flounder in the big pond of New York City (circa 1886) and Monique is a French sardine on the make for him, Maisie is a starfish and quite obviously their superior. Maybe, after all, she is lucky not to marry Horace.

At any rate, Maisie, Horace and Monique become internationally entangled in a Nineteenth Century newspaper war between James Gordon Bennett and Joseph Pulitzer in which the Statue of Liberty and its imaginary model are musically-comically at odds. And, as its ever artful songsmith, Irving Berlin comes riding at long last to Maisie's rescue with a face-saving torch song called "Falling Out of Love Can Be Fun."

But the real heroine of "Miss Liberty" is an under-the-bridge-heads Countess who is Monique's raffish grandmother. She is a wonderful old dame who, thanks to Ethel Griffies, talks, dances and sings away with every scene, every song and every situation with which she is concerned.

Robust Rendition.

Four decades ago, Ethel Griffies was a fine young favorite in London's musical-comedy world. Now, after 40 years of non-musicals and films, she is still a fine young favorite here in New York. Her robust rendition of the song

called "Only for Americans" is the best show-stopper at the Imperial. And she, although just about as French as Winston Churchill, is, to put it mildly, grand.

So is Mary McCarty as the tough but tender Maisie Dell. Even if her "Falling Out of Love" fools neither you nor her, her rich little poor girl is all the more appealing for its brash bravado. Eddie Albert's Horace Miller is a heartfelt hick from some Hicksville nowhere near Long Island. Allyn McLerie's Monique is a not-too-French French heroine who, at the drop of the conductor's baton, goes into her dance delectably.

Under Moss Hart's affectionate direction, "Miss Liberty" moves its plot and people from one typically Irving Berlin song hit—"Homework," "I Love You," "Let's Take an Old-Fashioned Walk"—to another. Even now they are on your hit parade, although not, as yet, the haunting "Paris Wakes Up and Smiles," sung hauntingly by John Thompson, and the composer's simple and touching setting for Emma Lazarus's "Give Me Your Tired, Your Poor."

This Irving Berlin-Robert E. Sherwood-Moss Hart production looks and sounds like your kind of a talk-dance-and-song show... Well, "Miss Liberty" is my girl, too. I expect to be seeing a great deal of her at the Imperial. Like her namesake, she will be around for quite some time.